

Doug Vincent-Lang
Commissioner



Department of
Fish and Game

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Division of Wildlife Conservation

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Black Bear DNA Matches Earlier Samples from Fatality Near Hope

August 17, 2020 (Anchorage)- The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) reports that DNA from one of the black bears killed near the site of a fatal bear attack matched samples collected during the investigation.

The initial attack that killed Daniel Schilling is believed to have been from a female brown bear. The cause of is still undetermined and may remain unknown whether it was a defensive or predatory attack. An empty bear spray canister with the safety removed was found at the attack location and the spray was discharged, but there were no witnesses to the events. No signs of cubs or a food cache were found in the area.

Sample analyses showed that both female brown bear and female black bear DNA were collected during the initial stages of investigation. The chance that a brown bear and a black bear were present at the site during the same time is unlikely. ADF&G believes that the black bear encountered Mr. Schilling's body after he was deceased. The DNA that animal left behind matched one of the black bears killed a week later. Results from the other two black bears and brown bear killed by ADF&G were not a match for any samples collected. All bears killed were female and none were with cubs or showed any signs of lactation.

Bear attacks are rare and finding the DNA of two different bear species at the site makes it even more unusual. ADF&G will continue collecting samples when sealing brown bears harvested by hunters and those killed under Defense of Life or Property (DLP) regulations. The area where the attack occurred is remote with challenging terrain and limited access. Additional field operations are not planned at this time.

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